United Nations E/C.19/2003/L.2/Add.7

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Limited
22 May 2003

Original: English

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Second session
New York, 12-23 May 2003
Agenda item 4 (f)
Mandated areas: education

Chairperson's summary

Education

Member States

1. The representative of Bangladesh noted that tribal peoples and ethnic minorities were protected under the Constitution from racism and discrimination and that special measures were in place to ensure access to education for underrepresented groups. The representative of Myanmar noted that the Government had implemented an indigenous education programme and strategies for the preservation of indigenous cultures, which were regarded as part of the national cultural heritage. The representative of Brazil discussed the Brazilian indigenous education strategy, which had improved the numbers of qualified indigenous teachers and increased their level of qualification. He also noted that priority was given to the production of indigenous educational resources to promote indigenous education. Brazil also called for a fresh approach to the negotiations over the draft United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples to ensure its adoption before the end of the decade. The Government of Sweden reported on its practices with Sami education and the increasing inclusion of Sami people in Swedish society. Nepal expressed support for the work of the Forum and noted that its Constitution guaranteed the rights of ethnic minorities and special measures for vulnerable groups. The Government of Nepal expressed its full commitment to the protection of human rights.

United Nations system

2. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) discussed the work of the organization in the compilation of best practices in indigenous education. A case study was presented on best practices in Guatemala. The UNESCO representative noted that there were currently no education structures designed for indigenous languages and yet instruction in the mother tongue was vital for the transmission of indigenous knowledge and culture.

03-26979 (E) 230503

UNESCO promoted bilingual education as a good practice. The representative also noted that the Dakar Action Plan applied equally to indigenous peoples and was based on the principles of tolerance, mutual respect and quality education for boys and girls. The Department of Public Information of the United Nations discussed its web-based Cyber School Bus programme (available at www.cyberschoolbus.un.org) and its desire to include indigenous education materials. The Department specifically requested primary source materials to increase the visibility of indigenous youth.

Indigenous peoples' organization

3. Many indigenous representatives discussed common education issues, including poor retention, attainment and graduation rates throughout the compulsory and non-compulsory years of schooling. Many indigenous representatives described overt and systemic racism and marginalization as root causes of the lack of educational attainment of indigenous young people. Some representatives emphasized the link between access to and success in early childhood education and ongoing success in later schooling and life.

4. Many indigenous representatives suggested solutions, which included but were not limited to:

Participation

(a) Establishing effective arrangements for the participation of indigenous parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of education services for their children, young people and other community members;

(b) Increasing the number of indigenous people employed as educational administrators, teachers, coaches, curriculum advisers, teacher's assistants, home-school liaison officers and other education workers, including community people engaged in teaching indigenous culture, history and contemporary society, and indigenous languages;

(c) Providing education and training services to develop the skills of indigenous people to participate in educational decision-making;

(d) Developing arrangements for the provision of independent advice from indigenous communities regarding educational decisions at all levels;

(e) Achieving the participation of indigenous children, young people and adults in education for a period similar to that for other students;

Access

(f) Ensuring that indigenous children, young people and adults have access to all levels of education (including adult education) on a basis comparable to that available to other citizens;

Attainment

(g) Enabling indigenous students to attain skills and graduation rates to the same standard as other students throughout the compulsory and non-compulsory schooling years;

Indigenous languages, proficiency in the lingua franca and numeracy

(h) Developing programmes to support the maintenance and continued use of indigenous languages;

(i) Enabling the attainment of proficiency in the lingua franca and numeracy competencies by all indigenous students including indigenous adults;

Capacity-building

(j) Providing community education services which will enable indigenous people to develop the skills to manage the development of their communities;

Appreciation, understanding and respect for indigenous cultures

(k) Enabling all students at all levels of education to have an appreciation, understanding and respect of traditional and contemporary indigenous histories, cultures and identities;

Anti-racism strategies

(l) Promoting anti-racism education, including strategies to empower young people to deal with racism in the compulsory schooling curriculum;

Self-determination

(m) Indigenous peoples should be resourced and supported to establish their own education systems, including schools, should they so choose. Also, traditional indigenous education and its structures should be respected and supported.

Forum members

5. Ms. Qin was appointed as the focal point for education. Ms. Lux de Coti urged UNESCO to hold seminars and workshops on indigenous languages and indigenous education. Mr. Choquehuanca discussed establishing indigenous universities as a strategy to improve education standards for indigenous peoples. Ms. Strogalschikova noted the success of the Siberian Academy, which was attended by 3,000 indigenous people, but noted that indigenous people were largely invisible in mainstream textbooks. Mr. Littlechild called for the inclusion and recognition of treaty rights to education and noted submissions calling for the recognition of an international indigenous university.